Groundhogs, Dachshunds, and Rabbits
(I hope these critters are right!)

By Dr. Richard Kelley

There was lots going on this week, but it could all be tied together by three furry friends – a groundhog, a dachshund, and a rabbit.

On Groundhog Day, February 2, Punxsutawney Phil, the nation’s most celebrated groundhog (also known as a woodchuck, a member of the squirrel family), stuck his head out of his cave in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, and, according to his handlers, did not see his shadow. As tradition has it, this indicates that a shorter winter is ahead and the severe snows, high winds, and bitter cold weather that has plagued most of the U.S. will go away soon and be replaced by spring.

Tell that to the workers in the Travel & Tourism industry. According to Today in Travel, there were 19,000 flight cancellations in the first three days of this week alone, as blizzards forced the closure of airports across the nation, snarled automobile traffic and wreaked havoc everywhere.

Gian Gandolfo, General Manager at Hilton Garden Inn Denver Airport, managed by Outrigger Lodging Services, tells me that while it has been hectic, storm-related No-Show have about balanced with storm-related No-Goes stranded by canceled flights.

Bill Peters, Vice President, Reservations, at our Worldwide Reservations Center in Denver, says our ‘ohana there never missed a beat this week in spite of the extreme cold and snow in the Mile High City. On Monday, January 31, the high temperature at Denver International Airport was minus 1 degree Fahrenheit (minus 18, Celsius), breaking the previous low record high of plus 2 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 17, Celsius) set in 1985.

All the central computer equipment for the Center is housed in secure sites with backup power. Virtually all the members of our ‘ohana work out of offices in their own homes, so few had to brave an icy, slippery commute on snow-covered roads. Power did go out at the homes of several of our agents, but calls were swiftly and automatically shifted to other agents.

The awful weather is not limited to the United States and Canada. Members of our ‘ohana in Queensland, Australia, have been playing tag with a series of typhoons. See Grant James’ article on page 7 for details.

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Not wanting to rely exclusively on Punxsutawney Phil, I took our little dachshund “Oscar” outside. As the snow fell on both of us, he let me know that he definitely could not see his shadow, confirming that spring must not be too far off!

The next day, February 3, it was Chinese New Year, beginning the Year of the Rabbit.

According to one of the many Chinese horoscope sites on the Internet, “The Rabbit is said to be calm and gentle, but persistent. The Year of the Rabbit is traditionally associated with home and family, artistic pursuits, diplomacy, and keeping the peace. Therefore, 2011 is very likely to be relatively calmer than 2010, both on the world scene, as well as on a personal level. Others will suffer, by degree, depending on how flexible they are to the world mood. Those who have cultivated careful negotiation skills (or, perhaps more importantly, can sniff out and swiftly dodge dangerous situations!), may attain similar good luck enjoyed by rabbits and those compatible with them in 2011.”

In Denver, despite the snow and cold, there were many celebrations of Chinese New Year this week. Linda and Jimmy Yip gathered their friends together to remember the meaningful but tragically short life of their only child, Nathan. A high school classmate of my son Chris, Nathan was killed in an automobile accident at age 19 while a freshman at Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. The Yips use the occasion of Chinese New Year to raise funds to support the construction of schools for underprivileged children primarily in China, but also in Haiti, Mexico, Africa, and the U.S.A. During the rest of the year, Linda and Jimmy travel to these areas to personally supervise these projects.

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